

# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

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Testimony of Michelle Cruz, Esq., State Victim Advocate  
Judiciary Committee  
Monday, March 22, 2010

Good morning Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee. For the record, my name is Michelle Cruz and I am the Victim Advocate for the State of Connecticut. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in **SUPPORT** of:

**Raised House Bill No. 5030**, *An Act Concerning the Forfeiture of Money and Property Related to Child Sexual Exploitation and Human Trafficking and the Possession of Child Pornography*

Most crime victims are thrown into the criminal justice process with little or no understanding of the process. Most are educated by television, for example Law and Order or CSI; the crime is committed, an arrest is made and the trial is held all within 60 minutes. In real life, even cases that appear to be a slam dunk, take time to properly investigate and further, time to prepare for trial. The OVA hears from many victims of sexual assault that are frustrated with the lengthy investigative process conducted by law enforcement. The OVA spends a great deal of time educating sexual assault victims on the complexities of these cases, including cases involving late reporting or lack of physical or DNA evidence. Many times the OVA will reach out to the law enforcement agency to obtain information regarding a sexual assault investigation and find that the investigation is right on track. Other times, the OVA will find it necessary to meet with the law enforcement agency or others to discuss the progress of the investigation. In all cases, however, the sentiment is quite similar with investigations involving sexual assault--there is a strong need for law enforcement to receive specialized training in the investigation of sexual assault cases.

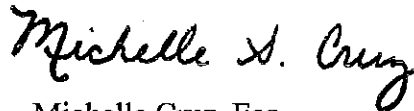
This type of crime has unique variables associated with both an offender and a victim. Law enforcement should be trained yearly as to the advancements in investigative techniques as well as the best practices for investigating sexual assault cases. For instance, research suggests the best time to interview a sexual assault victim is two days after the assault- at this time, according to the research the victim will be most likely to recall the facts of the assault. Thus an officer, who's unaware of this fact may interview a victim on the day of the assault and not follow up and lose imperative information that would have been gleaned at a later time. In addition, we know that rape victims are reluctant to come forward. When they make that courageous step, it is imperative to not only the success of the prosecution, but more importantly, the victim's healing, that the victims first encounter with law enforcement is compassionate and appropriate.

Furthermore, we still live in a country that blames the victim of sexual assault and is often eager to disbelieve the sexual assault victim. Although it is important to interview the victim and confront any discrepancies that may exist, but with this population, in order to do so, the officer will require specialized training so as not to emotionally and mentally harm the victim. Moreover, Connecticut still has many police departments without the availability of funds for a specialized detective unit to process sexual assault investigations. Therefore, in some of our jurisdictions all sexual assaults will be reported to and investigated by the patrol officers who may or may not have ever participated in a sexual assault investigation or been trained on how to process this type of case.

Lastly, the populations of sexual assault victims are often plagued with self blame and doubt, thus, are reluctant to really be in a position to know what information is helpful for police to know in the investigation. A specially trained officer will know what questions to ask to best obtain all information necessary to successfully prosecute the case and preserve the integrity of the case. An officer who is not trained in sexual assault may neglect imperative information which may cause a victim to appear inconsistent or, worse yet, become impeached at trial.

Section 2 of House Bill No. 5030 provides for this training. I urge the committee to support this measure on behalf of sexual assault victims. Thank you for consideration of my testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michelle S. Cruz". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michelle Cruz, Esq.  
State Victim Advocate